I wrote a tweet about this but deleted it, since it's a much more nuanced topic than can be discussed there. Nuclear weapons are the Chekhov's gun on the world stage.

When, if ever, are they going to be fired? When should they be?

I suspect this is not a question a lot of people give much thought to, since it's obvious nukes are terrible and we should never use them, right? Mutually assured destruction and all that. But what if you think about this in a long term historical context? Surely in the past some terrible weapon was created and there was a great moral panic about it, probably something today that we consider quaint.

I suspect that in 100 years nuclear weapons will seem quaint. It's so easy to imagine weapons that are way more horrible, think drone swarms and bioweapons. Oh that's cute, it blows up a city. This new weapon seeks out and kills every <insert race here> person on earth and tortures them before they die. Even worse, these sort of weapons can be deployed tactically, where for nukes that's actually kind of hard. Nobody wants an irradiated pile of rubble.

With that understood, when do we want to fire the nukes?

Firstly, they will not kill all humans. Probably around a third, on par with the black death or the Khmer Rouge. And they will not create a nuclear winter ending all life. They may change the climate, but not more than the asteroid that killed the dinosaurs.

I understand the loss of short-term growth is a hard pill to swallow, but would we be better or worse off in 100 years if we fired all the nukes today? It is not clear to me that the answer is worse. The nukes will force systems to decentralize and become less complex, but in exchange those systems will become more robust. Will Google survive an all-out nuclear exchange? Will the Bitcoin blockchain?